

Equine Metabolic Syndrome (EMS)

What is Equine Metabolic Syndrome (EMS)?

EMS is a multifactorial disease of hormones. It is associated with development of laminitis in overweight middle aged horses and ponies.

What are the signs associated with EMS?

- Usually overweight or obese horses and ponies
- Fat deposits or bumps on the horse may be in a localised area or may appear all over the body
- Cresty neck
- Insulin resistance

What causes EMS?

It is thought to be due to higher leptin concentrations in the blood and then the body develops resistance to leptin. Leptin is known as the “satiety factor” and is released by fatty tissues when the horses energy is plentiful. In normal horses, leptin is increased only in late summer in preparation for the winter. EMS horses have increased leptin throughout the entire year which leads to over eating, weight gain and obesity.

Prevention and management of EMS

The mainstay of managing EMS is dietary management and weight loss!

- Provide hay that has lower nonstructural carbohydrate (NSC) content e.g. oaten or grass hay
- Restrict lush pasture access/ limited hours grazing
- Increase exercise load to increase insulin sensitivity